

OCTOBER 12, 2001

STATEMENT OF U.S. REPRESENTATIVE JAN SCHAKOWSKY DURING NATIONAL SECURITY SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING ON THE THREAT OF BIOLOGICAL TERRORISM

WASHINGTON, D.C. - This subcommittee has heard over the last few years about existing threats to the United States and what needs to be done to maximize successful prevention and response capabilities. The Chairman and members of this subcommittee have recognized the importance of this issue for some time. The events of last month clearly make today's hearing even more important.

One ongoing theme we have heard from expert witnesses on the subject of preparing for threats that exist to the United States is that we lack a clear understanding of which threats are most likely to occur. The materials prepared by both the minority and majority for today underscore the need for such an assessment.

We know that biological weapons exist. We know that various nations have had and may continue to have biological weapons programs. The threat of biological terror does exist. The question is to what extent and how do we best prepare for and attempt to prevent it.

In my view, we need to take some immediate steps. We must conduct a comprehensive assessment of existing threats to the United States.

The United States must return to our efforts on the biological weapons convention. In July this subcommittee held hearing on the importance of this issue to our security and now it is even clearer that we cannot afford to sit out of the negotiations because of pharmaceutical industry concerns or difficulty in enforcing international principles on non-proliferation of biological weapons.

The previous Administration did not go far enough in its efforts to engage the international community on the issue of biological weapons production. However, this Administration has no good reason to abandon those efforts, particularly given the current situation. The international coalition that the Administration has assembled in the war on terrorism presents the Administration with a golden opportunity to make some real progress on this subject.

It is clear that we need to invest more heavily in measures to enhance our security. This will obviously include efforts to make air travel safer, provide law enforcement and the intelligence communities the tools they need, and adequately fund our armed forces.

It is also absolutely clear that we need to make a major investment in our public health infrastructure. We need to have a computer and an internet connection at every hospital and health clinic in this country, more training for local medical personnel and other first

responders, efforts to address the shortage of skilled nurses and others in the emergency care community, and ways to provide for expanded surge capacity at our medical facilities.[] []

And I want to add one final point.[] This subcommittee has held numerous hearings on anthrax.[] We know that Bioport, the only company with which the DoD has contracted to produce the vaccine, needs to seriously clean up its act.[] I do not need to revisit my dismay at the situation the DoD has gotten us into on this issue.[] But I do want to suggest to my colleagues that we might need a larger role for the federal government in the development of vaccines that are necessary for our security.[] []